

Speech given by Cathaoirleach, Monaghan County Council, Cllr PJ O'Hanlon on Wednesday 7th June 2017, Oireachtas, Dublin

Chairman Richmond, Members of the Oireachtas, on behalf of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor Local Authority grouping I would like to thank you for your invitation to address the Special Select Committee on the UK withdrawal from the European Union.

Our delegation today comprises Chairs/Mayors, Vice Chairs and Chief Executives from all of the Local Authorities who comprise the Border Corridor. The size of the delegation reflects how important this issue is not just for local authorities, but for all of us who live and work along the Border Corridor.

There is no doubt that the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border area will be most affected by Brexit. After Brexit the border will become a gateway both into and out of the European Union. Whilst the situation remains uncertain there is a strong indication that the UK will exit both the single market and the Customs Union. In discussion with MEP's it is very clear that if this is the case the EU will need to protect their market and therefore enforce controls on the Border. No one wants to see that happening. Controls along the border will impact negatively, not just along the border but Ireland as a whole.

Border Local Authorities recognised very quickly after the 23rd June 2016 referendum that there would be an impact on the people of the region. They worked with their Local Authority led cross border groups, East Border Region, ICBAN and the North West Regional Development Group to present a stronger and more coherent case on the impacts on the border region.

It soon became clear however that despite there being different challenges and opportunities depending on what area of the border you live in, Brexit represents a common challenge for all of the

people of the region. Without a Government in Northern Ireland and negotiations taking place between Brussels and London directly Local Authorities felt it necessary to champion the needs of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Region. Thus began the Border Corridor response to Brexit. The MOU between Newry, Mourne and Down DC and Louth County Council facilitated by East Border Region was a catalyst for our engagement and all border Councils readily came on board in November 2016.

Our first task was to commission a study to begin to explore what the actual impact of Brexit might be along the corridor. This was not an easy task considering the huge uncertainty around what Brexit actually means. The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre was appointed to undertake a piece of work on behalf of all border councils which would explore the risks, opportunities and issues to consider regarding Brexit.

The study completed in February 2017 and a major event “Brexit and the Border Corridor; What next for Local Authorities and Business?” was held on 4th May 2017 in the Lough Erne Resort. 148 delegates from all the Local Authorities and representatives from the Chambers Of Commerce were in attendance and delegates endorsed a border corridor approach going forward.

Our aim today is to highlight the needs of the Border Corridor and to stress two overarching strategic points which emanated from our initial study of the Border Corridor.

- Firstly, that Brexit will impact on all aspects of the economy of our region. An economic border post Brexit would be disastrous for our region. Mr John Kelpie, Chief Executive, Derry & Strabane District Council will outline the key elements of this contention.

- Secondly, that Brexit will impact on the people and communities of the Border Corridor. The Good Friday Agreement must be protected during Brexit negotiations. Mrs Joan Martin, Chief Executive, Louth County Council will present our findings in this respect.

Cllr Stephen McCann, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council will provide a summary of the Border Corridor position.